

**Hoverfly
Newsletter**
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This issue of the newsletter is one of the shortest in recent years, as few articles were offered in the second half of 2017. The first Hoverfly Newsletter was produced in October 1982, a year before the publication of the first edition of **British Hoverflies** (Stubbs and Falk). In that first newsletter Philip Entwistle informed readers that funds would probably be available to support two issues per year; however the newsletter got off to a slowish start and 1988 was the first year (with numbers 7 and 8) actually to have two issues. Since then there have only been two years that did not have two issues, and for many years they have coincided with the distribution of the twice-yearly Dipterists Forum Bulletin. There is a temptation when not much copy has been received for an editor to delay publication for six months in the hope that further articles will be submitted in that time. However I continue to resist that particular temptation in order to keep the content topical - a newsletter should, after all, be about *news*. In the first newsletter Philip envisaged the publication as typically comprising 4 to 6 sides (of A4); at least this issue conforms to that pattern.

Hoverfly Newsletter No. 1 featured articles on *Eriozona syrphoides*, *Dasysyrphus friuliensis*, *Parasyrphus malinellus* and *Melangyna quadrimaculata* among others. Please continue to send in articles on any aspect of hoverflies.

Copy for **Hoverfly Newsletter No. 65** (which is expected to be issued with the Autumn 2018 Dipterists Forum Bulletin) should be sent to me: David Iliff, **Green Willows, Station Road, Woodmancote, Cheltenham, Glos, GL52 9HN, (telephone 01242 674398), email: davidiliff@talk21.com**, to reach me by 20th June 2018.

The hoverfly illustrated at the top right of this page is a female *Leucozona glauca*.

Hoverfly Recording Scheme Update: Winter 2017

Stuart Ball, Roger Morris, Ian Andrews, Joan Childs, Ellie Rotheray and Geoff Wilkinson

HRS REACHES 1 MILLION RECORDS!

As of 16 December 2017, the HRS database contains 1,050,003 records, which comprise a mixture of full and partial records together with a few records from other families that have crept in on spreadsheets. When filtered to extract 'unique' records, the dataset stands at 911,709 records, to which a further 87,345 publicly accessible records exist on the NBN that we do not have on the main dataset. The combined total therefore stands at 999,186 records. There are also some 20-25,000 records on iRecord and other datasets that will be absorbed in the coming weeks as well as around 8,000 records from the Facebook group still to absorb and

there is a steady stream of spreadsheets arriving daily. So we can say with confidence that the scheme has passed the 1 million records milestone!

Graph 1 shows that there has been steady growth in the database since we took the scheme on in 1991 although there was lull in activity in the early 2000s. Since 2014 the jumps in incoming data have been somewhat more pronounced because the UK Hoverflies Facebook page is so active; it now generates at least 30,000 records a year, which is at the top end of what we used to receive from all our recorders up to 2011! In the last year we have seen an important shift towards FB members maintaining their own spreadsheets and submitting these independently. This is a great development because we would otherwise not have managed to keep on top of the data-flow. This change needs to continue into the coming years because Stuart and Roger need to ease out of the driving seats and let others take over (more in a separate note).

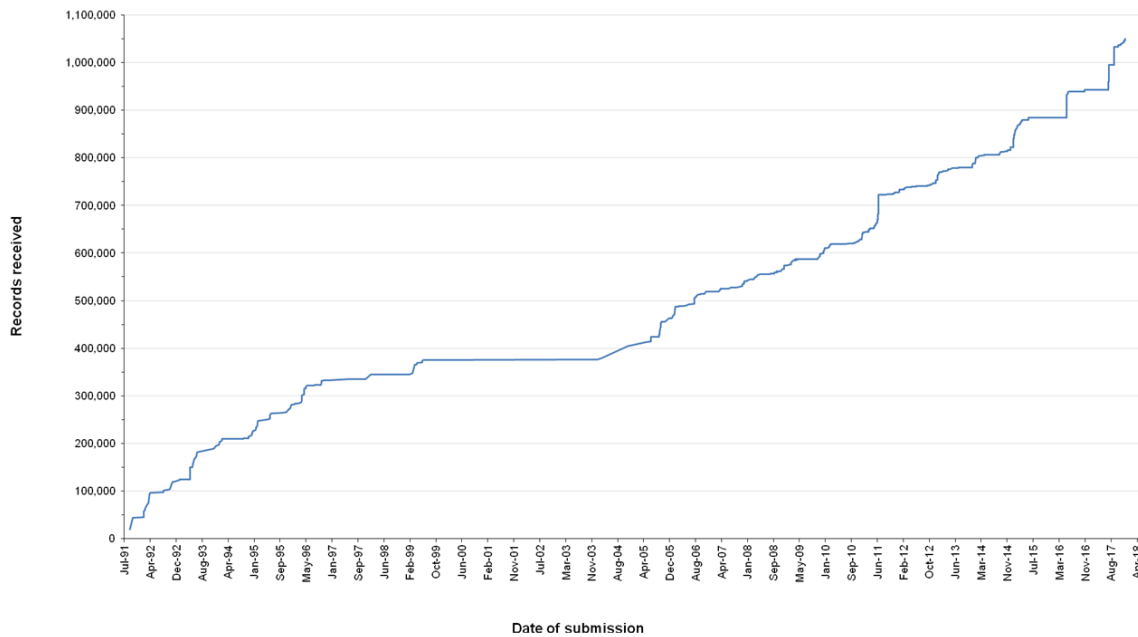


Figure 1. Growth of the HRS database since 1981

When the last provisional atlas was published, just 20 recorders contributed 50% of the data. In the following 6 years, the situation has changed; we now find that 46 recorders have contributed 50% of the data and 201 recorders have provided 80% of the data. This is a much-needed diversification of effort. Nevertheless, the scheme is still heavily reliant upon a relatively modest core of recorders. We think that this will change further as there are strong signs within the Facebook group that a significant number of people are now very active recorders. Figure 2 indicates how the composition of active recorders now stands.

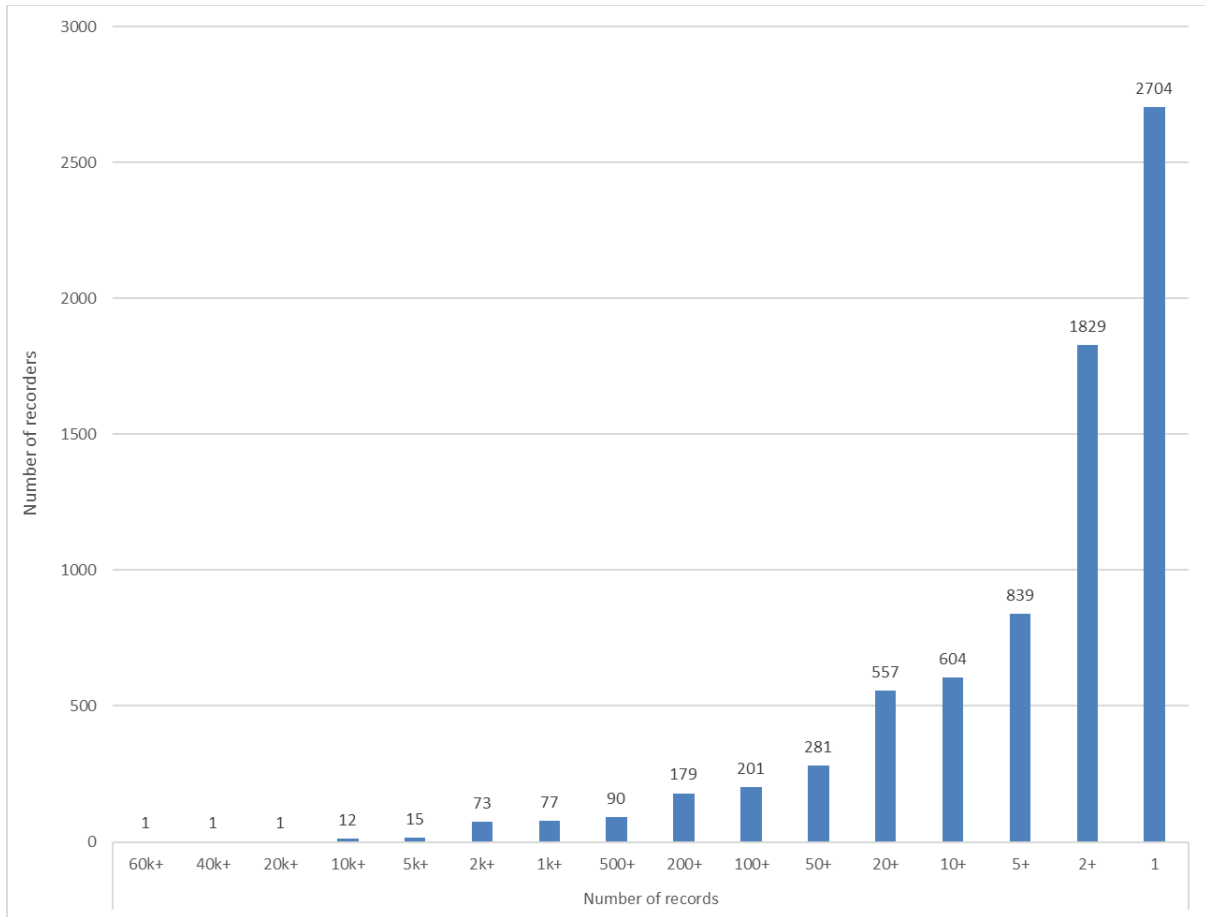


Figure 2. Numbers of recorders against the numbers of records submitted

The big question is “what are we actually doing with the records?” An important question because it is all very well accruing records, but something needs to happen with them. We are making progress! This autumn, Stuart and Roger have updated the charts and maps in a revised draft atlas and Roger has flagged up the areas where there is a need to question the records; he has also revised the species account texts. What now needs to happen is for the questionable records to be investigated and either marked "requiring confirmation" so that they don't show in the atlas, or accepted. This is a big job and will take several months. Nevertheless, a revised atlas is on the cards for 2018.

Stuart and Roger have also spent a lot of time investigating the trends seen in individual species and trying to establish how reliable they are. This analysis suggests that the scale of the shift away from specimen-based records is such that trends for some species are being affected. There is a draft paper in preparation and we think it is of sufficient importance to be placed in one of the high impact journals because it is highly significant for all models that depend upon data from traditional specimen-based recording as well as modern photographic recording. Modelling has also shown that it is probable that at least one, and possibly more species of hoverfly is retreating from south-east England. If this is the case, it is also an important finding because there are very few studies that clearly show range retreat (apart from in montane situations where some species have been shown to be retreating to higher altitudes). We have a bit more work to do on this analysis, but we think that it too merits a high impact paper. There are two or three other items that need to be published that will probably go into lower impact journals. Once they have been published, more can be said in this newsletter and on the Facebook groups.

Call for records

Many recorders submit data on a yearly basis, but there are some who do so intermittently. We would be very grateful if those who have not submitted records recently would do so. Contact Roger and he will let you know when we last had your records. Hopefully, by the end of 2018 we will have the database as realistically up-to-date as possible and will be able to place it on the NBN.

Time for a succession plan for the HRS

Stuart Ball & Roger Morris

When we took on the HRS back in 1991 it was in a sad state. There had not been a scheme organiser for 4 years, the data were stacked on cards in boxes at BRC and there was little prospect of an atlas or any access to the data. In the following years that stack of data was computerised. Electronic data were trawled and absorbed into the database and eventually two provisional atlases were produced. The data were also used to undertake the species-status review for hoverflies that was published in 2014 and by a variety of teams who have used occupancy models to investigate trends in pollinating insects and in wildlife in general. This year we passed the 1 million record mark, which is a magnificent milestone for a scheme that started out as a simple mapping project.

We have been at the helm for 26 years and time is approaching when we must think about passing on the role of custodians. We are not the HRS – it is bigger than us; and if we are to do our job properly we must make sure that successors are in place so that we can retire and let new people take the scheme in whichever direction they feel is appropriate.

Obviously we would like to provide a bit of direction in the early transition from our stewardship to that of a new team. The process has already started because we now have a much bigger team involved with the HRS. Ian, Joan, Geoff and Ellie each bring new skills to the team and make it a lot more resilient. BUT Stuart still manages the database and Roger does the vast amount of data validation and assembly. This needs to change. Both of us feel the need to find replacements, especially as we need to concentrate on the forthcoming guide to Diptera that we have promised to deliver to the Field Studies Council by early 2020.

This note is therefore a first call for volunteers to get involved in the scheme. We really need a team of data extractors/managers, a database manager and people who understand modern occupancy models to do some of the analysis. It is unrealistic to think that there are just two jobs: we need a small army of people to take over! BUT we also want to find people who will act as 'leaders'. Some of these roles do not necessarily require great taxonomic skills (those can develop with time). What is required is drive, vision, and a curious mind. There is definitely a place for some younger enthusiasts; are you one of those people? If so, we want to hear from you? Why do you want to get involved; what will you bring to the role and how will you make sure that you act in the interests of the scheme and its contributors?

Yellow (Marzi-) Pan Trap

Christine Storey
Wimborne, Dorset

Buying a coffee can have its unexpected moments. In mid October this year, whilst idly listening to the musical hisses and rumbles of a confectioner's espresso coffee machine, I spotted a solitary insect flying around the window area. Its route was initially haphazard until it flew near a display counter where something caught its attention. I must have blinked because I then saw the large fly walking on the surface of an iced display cake. The insect, which I'm told is a Dronefly, *Eristalis tenax*, stayed on the yellow icing flowers for a quiet couple of minutes probing the flowers with its proboscis. A couple of times it paused and flew a little to the right as if eyeing up the next floral offering only to return to the yellow cluster. Anthropomorphically speaking that fly clearly liked the look of the blooms but had to work hard to find the nectar or pollen it was presumably after. I took this photo when the barista had her back to me in an otherwise empty shop so I don't think the sensibilities of either the staff or the fly were offended by the taking of this picture.



Postscript

Hoverfly Newsletter No. 63 included a note about an association of *Ferdinandea cuprea* with the flowers of *Colchicum autumnale*. Readers may be amused to know that, following the posting of the same item on the website of the Gloucestershire Naturalists' Society, a link to it from the Society's Facebook page appeared in the newsfeeds of more than 800 Facebook users. It would be nice to think that this was evidence of a significantly increased nationwide interest in hoverflies, but the mention in the article of the vernacular name for *Colchicum autumnale*, Naked Ladies, is the likely explanation for this phenomenon. Clearly occasional mention of such terms may serve to raise the profile of hoverflies, other Diptera, and wildlife generally now that we are into an era of electronic communication mediated by search engines!